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AMERICAN POLICY IN THE FAR EAST.

BY BRITANNICUS.

THE course of American policy in the Far East has for many years been followed in Europe with a certain perplexity. That the United States has definitely enrolled the integrity of China and the principle of the open door among the objects of its diplomatic solicitude is by now pretty well understood. But how much weight is to be attached to this development is a question which Americans themselves, perhaps, could hardly answer with any precision and which European statesmen and publicists find frankly bewildering. The uncertainty is very largely due to the fact that nobody knows whether the diplomatic activities of the State Department represent a settled national policy or merely the views and whims of individual Secretaries of State. Mr. Hay, Mr. Root and Mr. Knox in the past twelve years have all formulated proposals and written despatches that seemed to commit the United States beyond escape to a leading rôle in the drama of Far-Eastern politics. Their countrymen to all appearances have applauded and supported them. It has, I should judge, sincerely gratified Americans to see their statesmen acquitting themselves with such distinction and success in competition with Oriental and European diplomats; and what one may call the sentimental sincerity of the American attachment to the open door I take to be beyond question. But diplomacy to be effective rests, and can only rest, on the implication of force. "If anything is to be done in the world," the Kaiser once declared, "the pen will be powerless to carry it through, unless backed by the might of the sword." Is American diplomacy in the Far East the diplomacy of the pen, or of the pen backed by the sword? Are Americans sufficiently interested in the fortunes of China or of Manchuria to contemplate the pos-

sibility of war? Is there any conceivable development in the Far-Eastern situation—short of an organized and deliberate attack upon American lives or possessions—that could induce American opinion to sanction the use of force? Does American diplomacy in the Far East belong to the sphere of *Real-politik*, or is it rather to be described as a series of more or less astute adventures in the art of bluffing? Is there not an unwritten mandate imposed upon Mr. Knox, as upon his predecessors, by the public sentiment of the United States—a mandate to the effect that he may spill ink, but must not think of spilling blood? All the world knows that America would rush to arms to punish or prevent a violation of the Monroe Doctrine. But although the Far East of recent years has been as much a preoccupation of American diplomacy as South America, can any one assert that it stands on a similar footing of actuality or that if, for instance, Japan were to close the door in Manchuria to-morrow Americans would feel irresistibly compelled to go to war? Another Boxer rising endangering the lives and properties of American residents in China, an invasion of the Philippines by an Oriental Power—in such contingencies as these American action could be predicted with every confidence. But apart from these extreme developments, and taking the Far-Eastern situation as it is to-day, is there anything in the effort to save Manchuria from drifting from its Chinese moorings and to prevent its political and commercial monopolization by Russia and Japan, or in the struggle for railway and mining concessions, of which not only Manchuria, but all Northern China, is to be once again the international battle-ground, or in the intricate political competition that is interwoven with the fight for trade, or in the “racial” issue or the naval issue, or in the prospect that Korea must pass finally, formally and completely into Japanese hands—is there anything in all this, or can anything be imagined as arising from all this, that American opinion would regard as a legitimate *casus belli*? The doubts that obtain under this head are the chief factor in the perplexity with which, as I began by saying, American diplomacy in the Far East is regarded in Europe. Nobody quite knows what fighting value, if any, should be attached to it, or whether Mr. Knox’s prolific pen bears any correspondence to the material preparations or the national will power and determination that would be necessary to enforce the policies that

flow from it. Is America in the Far East just amusing herself by playing at *Weltpolitik* or does she mean business? The objects of her diplomacy—to stave off the dismemberment of China and to preserve throughout the Far East an equality of commercial opportunity—are sufficiently clear. But how far is she ready to go to attain them? It is possible that even Americans are not yet in a position to answer that question with any definiteness. So far as an outsider can judge, they have not yet thought the matter out. In Europe, at any rate, among those who know the United States best, while American good-will is everywhere recognized as an asset of real value, the general opinion seems to be that Mr. Knox's diplomatic activities in the Far East are of a kind that can be countered and, if need be, resisted, without any serious risk of a more than verbal embroilment with the country he represents.

But while a readiness to fight is the ultimate touchstone of all diplomacy, and while a Power that shirks or overlooks the possibility of the final arbitrament of war is necessarily placed at an enormous disadvantage in the event of a real crisis, the ordinary business of international bargaining is carried on without much reference to the actual or potential power of the negotiators. The United States, through her character, the unselfishness of her aims and the moderation of her statesmen, has powerfully affected Far-Eastern developments during the past decade. Throughout the Boxer crisis Mr. Hay set the whole world a rare example of humane, pertinent and equitable diplomacy; he more than made up for the indifference and remissness of his predecessors in the State Department by taking a firm and definite stand in favor of the open door and the territorial integrity of the Celestial Empire; it was he who before the Russo-Japanese war did more than any other statesman to elucidate the realities of Russia's control over Manchuria; and it was through American intervention and on American soil that the Tsar and the Mikado concluded their treaty of peace. Up to the end of 1905, indeed, Europe was able to forecast American intentions and policies in the Far East with some exactitude. The United States was regarded as a Power which, itself indifferent to territorial aggrandizement at the expense of any Asiatic State, was resolved to protect China against partition, to insist on equal access to all the markets of the Far East, and to act as peacemaker among the nations. It

was thoroughly in accordance with these aims that Mr. Roosevelt should have remitted to China a portion of the Boxer indemnity—a stroke of policy as shrewd as it was chivalrous—and that just before the last Presidential election the United States should have formally entered, by means of an agreement with Japan, into the league of international peace which had gradually formed round the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. But concurrently with these developments other tendencies began to appear in American policy. In the first place, the admiration for Japan, which had taken a practical financial form during her struggle with Russia, quickly gave way, when the war was over, to an attitude of suspicion and complaint. Japan, it appeared, got almost as much upon American nerves as Germany upon British nerves; and the Americans suddenly concluded that Hawaii and the Philippines, if not the Pacific coast itself, were in danger of a Japanese raid, that American traders were being shut out of Manchuria and Korea, and that Japanese ambitions, political, commercial and naval, would one day necessitate a war for the mastery of the Pacific. These apprehensions were all for a time brought to a head by the mannerless, if rational, prejudice of California against the admission of Japanese immigrants; and the relations between the two peoples, though not between the two Governments, took on a temporary but undoubted acerbity. Even to-day, when the immigration question is in process of settling itself, a sentiment of hostility in American thoughts about Japan is very evident, and all over the United States there appears to be an uneasy consciousness that the future is likely to increase rather than diminish the chances and causes of friction between the two nations. There can, at any rate, be little doubt that American diplomacy to-day has acquired an anti-Japanese point, and that, as compared with five years ago, the misgivings entertained by the United States in regard to Japanese aims and policy, and the estrangement which has set in between the two peoples, must be reckoned as new factors in the Far-Eastern situation.

In the second place, these misgivings and this estrangement seem to have embraced not only Japan, but Japan's ally, and to have affected to an appreciable extent the popular American attitude towards Great Britain. Americans apparently resent the Anglo-Japanese alliance as ministering to Japanese "arrogance,"

as an act, almost, of treachery to the white race, and as placing Great Britain in a highly equivocal and unsatisfactory position in the event of trouble between the United States and Japan. A dozen years ago the State Department at Washington cheerfully threw on Lord Salisbury's shoulders the burden of defending the open door. To-day Americans conceive the state of affairs to be precisely reversed. They believe that Great Britain allows herself to be overridden by her inexorable ally, that she looks on in fatuous and supine complacency while Manchuria is converted into a Russo-Japanese province, and that, so far from assisting, she positively thwarts the endeavors of the United States to make the open door a reality. Mr. Schiff's tirade of last March, in the course of which he impartially belabored Great Britain, Russia and Japan, was regarded in Europe as a visible sign that in the Far East Great Britain and the United States were at the parting of the ways. Since then the wrangle over the Hankau-Szechuan loan and Great Britain's prompt rejection of Mr. Knox's scheme for the internationalization of the Manchurian railways have served to confirm the American belief that the Anglo-Japanese alliance means the sterilization of British policy and the abdication of British enterprise in the Far East. So far as I can judge, I do not think it is putting it too strongly to assert that a portion, at any rate, of the distrust and resentment with which Americans have watched the course of Japanese policy since the war falls upon Great Britain; that the State Department at Washington no longer counts upon Downing Street as an auxiliary in the struggle for the open door; that so far as American diplomacy is opposed to Japan, it is opposed also to the Anglo-Japanese alliance; and that the masses of Americans, whenever their attention is called to Far-Eastern affairs, find fresh confirmation for their suspicion that Great Britain is not "playing the game."

The third factor to alter the position of affairs since the Russo-Japanese war is the steady growth of American friendship with China—a friendship that Europe, with equal cynicism and ignorance, diagnoses as the resultant of the famous Chinese boycott of American goods. As the only Power whose interests on the Asiatic mainland are purely commercial, the United States has always stood high in Chinese regard; but to-day it is not too much to say that the Celestial Empire leans almost exclusively

on American support, and recognizes in the United States her best guide and well-wisher. If she has any champion at all in her efforts to maintain her sovereignty over Manchuria intact, that champion is America. If she has in the whole world a single sincere friend who would gladly see her strong, united and progressive, that friend is America. It is from America that China will receive the ablest and most disinterested assistance in converting herself into a modern State, just as it is from America that she has already received the most persistent encouragement in her campaign against opium. To direct Chinese advancement from the abundance of her own experience in matters of education, government and commerce, to be the tutelary genius of that vast, nerveless, disjointed but aspiring Empire, and to protect her by a vigilant diplomacy from the encroachments of her powerful neighbors—such is the high rôle to which America, more or less unconsciously, seems destined to be called. Side by side, at any rate, with American alienation from Japan there has proceeded an American *rapprochement* with China; and no European statesman doubts to-day that it is one of the objects of American diplomacy in the Far East to guard China and befriend her, to play her off as much as possible against Russia, Great Britain and Japan, and to reap a legitimate reward in a harvest of railway, mining and industrial concessions.

The three factors I have enumerated as forming the new American policy in the Far East—namely, a scarcely veiled antagonism to Japan, a suspiciousness both of Great Britain's attitude and of her effectiveness in regard to the open door, and an increasing intimacy and confidence in Chino-American relations—have to be reinforced by two other factors of not less weight and consequence. The first is the formal adoption by the American Government in the Far East, as in South America, of the German plan of pushing private trade by every artifice of official and diplomatic assistance. Mr. Taft's endorsement of this device has been often proclaimed, and his insistence upon American participation in the Hankau-Szechuan loan proved that he meant what he said and was determined to act upon it. So long as he is in the White House, and probably for much longer, one may, therefore, take it for granted that American financiers, contractors and concession-hunters and merchants in the Far East will enjoy the resolute backing of their Government, and that all

the knowledge and helpfulness possessed by an alert and highly trained consular and diplomatic service will be placed freely at their disposal. This is a development of very considerable moment because the motive power behind at least three-fifths of the international rivalries over China and Manchuria is the competition for trade. But of equal or even greater importance in shaping the course of American diplomacy at this juncture is the fact that the State Department is presided over by Mr. Knox. In place of the insight and imagination and the unvarying courtesy of Mr. Hay, and of the lucid, patient intelligence of Mr. Root, the world has now to reckon with Mr. Knox. The world, or, at any rate, the world of European diplomacy, has not, I am bound to confess, found the change at all to its taste. In his handling of both South-American and Far-Eastern affairs, Mr. Knox, to the surprise of all who remember him as a grave Constitutional lawyer, has shown a tendency to revert to the hectoring tone and the half-baked impulses that characterized the diplomacy of Mr. Blaine and Mr. Sherman as markedly as they did not characterize the diplomacy of Mr. Hay and Mr. Root. Although he has only been in office for some eighteen months, it is safe to say he has made more mistakes and occasioned more unnecessary and futile trouble than could be charged against his two predecessors during a whole decade. From the Crane episode to the squabble with Russia over the taxation imposed on American citizens by the Russian Railway Company at Kharbin, and onwards to his egregious proposals for the neutralization of the Manchurian railways, Mr. Knox has not once intervened in Far-Eastern affairs without receiving a rebuff, and exposing himself and his country to the laughter and amazement of the world.

The supreme instance of his heedlessness or incapacity was to be found, of course, in his astounding scheme for internationalizing the Manchurian railways. Feeling apparently that the various pledges and conventions that purport to regulate the status of Manchuria were hardly worth the paper they were written on, that Japan was exploiting Southern and Russia Northern Manchuria as though Chinese sovereignty were no more than a convenient fiction, that the door which it was promised should remain open had, in fact, been effectually closed on the outside world, that all forms of development to which Russia and Japan

objected had to be abandoned, that Great Britain was indifferent and China helpless and that Manchuria was rapidly lapsing into a Russo-Japanese preserve, Mr. Knox suggested that the Manchurian railways should be neutralized by sale to China, that the operation should be financed by the five leading Powers, and that the management of the lines should be placed under joint international control. In this way alone, argued Mr. Knox, could equality of commercial opportunity be guaranteed beyond question and Manchuria saved from becoming the cockpit of an international struggle for concessions and privileges. As a matter of mere theory, every one, I think, will agree that it would be better for the tranquillity of the Far East if Manchuria could be taken out of politics. But every one also must recognize that of all the dreams that ever beguiled the fancy of statesmanship this one is surely the least likely of realization, and that its first contact with the realities of the situation would shatter it to pieces. What are those realities? They are, first, that Russia and Japan but a few years ago waged the most terrible war of modern times, largely for the control of the railroad built by Russia under the Chinese concession of 1896; that by the Treaty of Portsmouth that control was divided between them, Russia retaining the northern section in her own hands and ceding the southern portion between Changchun and Port Arthur to Japan; and that since then both Powers have given abundant evidence of the importance they attach to the settlement thus obtained. Mr. Knox's proposals, therefore, while of interest to all Powers with a commercial or political stake in the Far East, peculiarly concerned Russia and Japan. Yet the American Secretary of State omitted to sound either Government in advance before springing his scheme upon the world. Without a moment's warning he launched a programme that contravened not only the Treaty of Portsmouth, but also the Convention with Japan by which the United States bound herself to observe the *status quo* that Mr. Knox now proposed to upset. That in itself was sufficiently startling. But the full inanity of Mr. Knox's adventure could only be revealed by referring to the material issues affected by it. Russia since the war by an immense effort has double-tracked the Trans-Siberian line. Mr. Knox invited her to surrender her control over the Northern Manchurian section, a section some eight hundred miles long, forming the final and vital

link in the Russian chain of connections with the Pacific. Without that link Vladivostok is left in the air, the heart of Siberia, whither Russia is transplanting her surplus population at the rate of a million souls a year, is laid open, the Amur Valley and all the maritime provinces are held on sufferance, and the Russian advance across Asia ends in a fatuous *cul-de-sac*. To ask St. Petersburg, under such circumstances, to abandon her rights of ownership and administration in the Northern Manchurian railway was like asking Great Britain to neutralize the Channel Islands or the United States to renounce its interest in the Panama Canal. For other but not less compelling reasons Japan is and must be equally tenacious of her hold over the line from Changchun to Port Arthur; and the American suggestion that she should vest it in an international board ominously recalled to her the intervention of France, Russia and Germany which robbed her of the fruits of her victory over China. I need say nothing as to the financial aspects of Mr. Knox's scheme or of the probability of its adoption. It never stood a moment's chance of acceptance. It was courteously but summarily rejected by both Tokio and St. Petersburg, and their refusal even to discuss it necessarily carried with it the refusal of the British, French and German Foreign Offices. Even now, after six months of inquiry and reflection, the world has failed to discover a single intelligible principle behind Mr. Knox's *émeute*.

None the less, it has had one important result, a result that a foreseeing American Secretary of State would have done anything rather than help to bring about, a result that is hardly less disastrous to the purposes of American diplomacy than a defeat at sea. In the first week of July the text of a new Russo-Japanese Agreement was published. By the terms of this memorable compact Russia and Japan agree to co-operate in all that concerns the working of their respective railways in Manchuria and to refrain from all rivalry that would prevent the attainment of this object. Both Powers agree to maintain the *status quo* in Manchuria as it has been established by the Treaties and Agreements not only between Russia and Japan, but also—a far-reaching provision, this—between either of these Powers and China. Furthermore, in case anything occurs to endanger the *status quo* the contracting Powers bind themselves to discuss together the measures necessary for its maintenance. Now there were doubtless

many influences at work to bring the antagonists of five years ago into the amicable relationship of which this new agreement is the proof. The recolonization of Manchuria by the Chinese, the absurdity of wasting time and energy on futile contentions over minor matters when both Russia and Japan had tacitly agreed not to renew the major struggle, and the necessity which Russia since the Balkan crisis of eighteen months ago has felt of concentrating in Europe—all this played its part in framing the Convention of July. But no one can doubt that Mr. Knox's proposals powerfully and, indeed, overwhelmingly contributed to the same end. Equally menacing the interests of Russia and Japan, they naturally predisposed those Powers towards concerted action.

I have tried in this article to elucidate the aims and motives of American policy in the Far East as they appear to a foreign and friendly onlooker. If I were to criticise them and to attempt an estimate of their relation to actual facts, I should have a great deal more to say. It would then, for instance, be necessary to show by irrefutable figures that the open door is not being violated in Manchuria by either Russia or Japan, that Great Britain is not by any means as weak or indolent in her Far-Eastern policy as she appears to be to Americans, and that most of the suspicions and apprehensions entertained by Americans are the product of imperfect information. That Manchuria is dominated throughout its length and breadth by Russia's and Japan's rights of ownership in the railways, and that the sheer force of economic pressure is slowly separating the province from China, is true enough. But only a miraculous transformation in the character and material organization of the Celestial Empire, or a war successfully waged against both Russia and Japan, can check the inevitable *dénouement*. The true policy for the United States is to avoid irritating where he cannot hurt and formulating proposals that it is impossible for her to carry out, to recognize that single-handed she can effect nothing, that Germany dare not and China cannot help her, and that her interests will best be served by a policy of cordial co-operation with the Powers in whose hands lies the decisive control of Far-Eastern events.

BRITANNICUS.